WHO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?! I PROMISE WE WON'T TELL!!
CROSS MY HEART AND HOPE TO DIE!
IT'S NOTHING INTERESTING, REALLY. JUST AN OLD CRUSH I THOUGHT I GOT OVER...
THAT WAS EXTREMELY LOW-QUALITY GOSSIP.
...EXCUSE ME?!
COME ON, AT LEAST TELL US WHY YOU GUYS WON'T GO TO THE PORTFOLIO REVIEWS!
WE'RE NEIGHBORS! BEST-FRIENDS-TO-BE!

TRADE YOU FOR A BOX OF PAWKY.
YOU CAN'T BUY ME WITH A BOX OF PAWKY...
TRADE YOU FOR 5 BOXES OF PAWKY?
...
.....
only human
AW, GO AHEAD. SHEESH.
SOLD!!
IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S A STATE SECRET OR ANYTHING, ANYWAY.
I'M NOT YOU, MAN.
I'LL GO FIND A BATHROOM, BE RIGHT BACK.
DON'T GET LOST!

OKAY, SO YOU SEE, SHE HAS THIS MOM...
UH-HUH.
RRIP
...WHO THINKS THAT BEING AN ARTIST IS A SURE-FIRE PATH TO LIVING IN A CARDBOARD BOX.
PFFT! BIG DEAL--SO DOES MINE! WATCH ME DO IT ANYWAY!
YES, WELL, DID YOUR MOM THREATEN TO DISOWN YOU IF YOU DREW COMICS FOR A LIVING?
REALLY? THAT'S HARSH.
YEAH, HER MOM'S... SHE'S GOT HIGH EXPECTATIONS.
BETH HAS TO SNEAK AROUND JUST TO HAVE THIS AS A HOBBY, LET ALONE A JOB THING IS, SHE DOESN'T JUST DRAW LIKE A NINJA, SHE'S GOT A GPA OF 4.4 IN LIKE, EVERYTHING SHE'S GOT TO--HER MOM JUST DOESN'T ACCEPT ANYTHING LOWER THAN AN A+
BETH'S GOTTA BE NOTHING LESS THAN THE PRESIDENT ONE DAY.
I SEE, I SEE. AND PRESIDENTS DON'T DRAW COMICS.
EXACTLY.
...WHY *DON'T* THEY DRAW COMICS?
BECAUSE THEY'RE KINDA BUSY RUNNING A COUNTRY?
WELL, THEY GET EVENINGS AND WEEKEN--
WHAT IS THIS?

I TURN MY BACK FOR ONE MINUTE!
AND YOU'RE SOCIALIZING AGAIN!!
DID YOU CUT ALL THE BOOKMARKS, AT LEAST?!!
CHIPS
UM, ALMOST...?
ALMOST?!
THE CON STARTS IN HALF AN HOUR!!
ARE THEY BOTHERING YOU?
NO, NO!
'CAUSE IF THEY ARE, YOU TELL ME, OKAY?
NO, IT'S FINE, REALLY, IT WAS FUN!
LOOK, THEY EVEN GAVE ME PAWKY!
WAS THAT MY PAWKY?!
...H-MAYBE...?
OOPS

OH! YOU CAN HAVE IT BACK!
NO, NO, PLEASE ENJOY...I'VE GOT MORE.
ANYTHING ELSE OF MINE YOU'VE BEEN HANDING OUT?!
NOW NOW, LET'S NOT OVERREACT...
Half an hour, huh? Ready or not, here we go...

CHAPTER 3
SKRTCH
SKRTCH

FRIDAY AFTERNOON.
IT'S A MYSTERY STORY ABOUT A DETECTIVE WHO LIVES IN THIS STRANGE TOWN WITH LOTS OF WEIRD STUFF HAPPENING.
AND HIS SECRETARY IS A GHOST!
THE ART LOOKS AMAZING.
THANK YOU.
SERIOUSLY, ISN'T HE HOT?!
MAN, HE CAN INVESTIGATE ME ANY DAY OF THE WEEK!
IT'S NOT REAL MANGA, THOUGH, IT'S AMERICAN STUFF.
WELL, I THINK IT LOOKS GOOD.
DAMN, NOW I WISH I DIDN'T BLOW ALL MY MONEY ON DVDS ALREADY...
WELL, YEAH, WHATEVER.
...OH JEEZ, RICK GOT GLOMPED AGAIN
WELL, UH...YOU CAN ALSO READ THIS ONLINE HERE, TAKE A FLYER.
OH COOL, THANKS! WE'LL MAKE SURE TO CHECK IT OUT!

...
HEADDESK
CAREFUL. IF YOU BREAK IT, YOU BUY IT...
I CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS.
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN IT'S NOT REAL MANGA??!! DOES IT LOOK LIKE IT'S MADE OF STRAW OR SOMETHING?! AND WHAT'S WITH THE 'SPENT ALL MY MONEY ON DVDS' LINE?? THE COMIC IS THREE BUCKS! THREE! THEY'LL SPEND TEN TIMES THAT ON JUNK FOOD THIS WEEKEND!!
GNAW GNAW
JUNK FOOD IS AN ESSENTIAL FOOD GROUP FOR THE GROWING TEEN ORGANISM.
CALM DOWN, MAYBE IT'LL PICK UP.
FOUR HOURS OF SITTING HERE AND ONLY ONE SALE EXCUSE ME WHILE I CRY LIKE A GIRL.
HEY, YOU GUYS DOING OKAY?
MISERABLE.

...YOU SEEM TO BE DOING WELL, THOUGH
CAN I GET THESE TWO, AS WELL?
SURE! WOULD YOU LIKE A FOLDER FOR THEM?
YEAH, WELL, WE'VE BEEN AROUND FOR A WHILE...AND WE SELL MOSTLY FANART AND DOUJINSHI, WHICH USUALLY DOES MUCH BETTER SALES-WISE. YOURS ARE ORIGINAL CHARACTERS, RIGHT?
YEAH. YOU DON'T DO ANY?
HA HA, NO--WE TRIED ONCE, AND WE BOMBED SO BAD!
WELL, AT LEAST WE AREN'T THE ONLY ONES!
IT HELPS IF YOU HAVE A POPULAR COMIC, SOMETHING THAT MAKES A CHARACTER RECOGNIZABLE TO PEOPLE BUT, WELL...
...WHERE DO YOU GET A POPULAR COMIC, RIGHT?
EXACTLY
MAYBE WE SHOULD ASK FOR ONE FOR CHRISTMAS
HEY, DO YOU GUYS EVER GET THIS 'NOT REAL MANGA' SPIEL FROM PEOPLE?
UGH, YEAH.

IT'S NOT SO BAD MOST OF THE TIME--MANY PEOPLE DON'T REALLY CARE EITHER WAY. BUT SOME MANGA PURISTS CAN GET REALLY NASTY.
CALL YOUR STUFF 'MANGA' IN THEIR PRESENCE AND THEY'LL BE CRAPPING KITTENS FOR A WEEK!
JUST IGNORE IT AND DO YOUR THING--YOU'LL LOSE LESS SANITY THAT WAY.
HA! TOO LATE!
CHRISS, YOU KEEPING TRACK OF THE TIME? DIDN'T YOU WANT TO GO TO THE FANFIC PANEL?
OH YEAH! THAT'S SOON, RIGHT?
YES. IN 3 MINUTES
WHAT?!
ZOOM
...
YOU KNOW HOW PEOPLE COMPLAIN THAT ANIME CHARACTERS ARE UNREALISTIC AND SPAZZES LIKE THAT DON'T REALLY EXIST?
YEAH.
I POINT TO HER.
AND I POINT TO THEM.

HEY, UM...
HMM?
SERIOUSLY...DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE BAD SALES. IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THAT WHEN YOU JUST START OUT. JUST GOTTA KEEP TRYING.
OH, HEH. I'M NOT WORRIED. I DON'T REALLY CARE, HONESTLY--THIS IS CHRISTIE'S THING. I JUST CAME TO MEET OTHER ARTISTS AND SEE WHAT A CON LOOKS LIKE.
OH YEAH? AND HOW IS IT SO FAR?
I LOVE IT.
I NEVER GET TO GEEK OUT SO MUCH BACK HOME. I HANG OUT ON SOME ART FORUMS, BUT THE VIBE JUST ISN'T THE SAME.
ALSO, WELL...
It's nice to not have to hide.

MEANWHILE, DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THE CONVENTION CENTER...
STRAIGHT, THEN TURN LEFT...WAIT, NO, RIGHT.. STAIRCASE? I DIDN'T SEE A...
HMM.
DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?
UH-OH, I REMEMBER THIS...
!?
...AND THIS!!! NOOOOO, I'M IN THE WRONG WING!
...AGAIN!!

...OKAY, DEJA VU.
HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO *NOT* SUCK--BY REPEATING ALL THE WAY TO...
...LIDA RIGHT BEHIND ME!!
WHAT?!
WHAT?!?!
.....
SORRY, 'SCUZE ME...
PLACE IS FULL OF WEIRDOES THIS WEEKEND..
...LIFE, YOU ARE OFFICIALLY FIRED ON ACCOUNT OF NOT BEING FAIR.

NO WAY I'M MAKING THAT PANEL NOW... DAMMIT...

MATT!!
I shouldn't.
He has a girlfriend.
And in three days I'll never see him again.

So why...
...complicate things?
It's for the best.

...HELLO. IS THIS SEAT TAKEN?
NO WILL-POWER.
OH, HEY!
NAH, KNOCK YOURSELF OUT.
HEY!! I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO LEAVE THIS ALONE!!
OI, DOWN IN FRONT!! THIS ONE'S GONNA BE GOOD.
THIS PLACE IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND. ARE YOU STALKING ME OR SOMETHING?
AW, YOU WISH.
I JUST KIND OF LOST THE CONVENTION AND ENDED UP HERE, IF YOU MUST KNOW.
YOU LOST THE CONVENTION.
I GOTTA HEAR THIS.
OKAY, SO YOU SEE, THIS PLACE WAS OBVIOUSLY BUILT BY A NAVIGATIONALLY CHALLENGED ARCHITECT...

SKRTCH SKRTCH
SKRTCH SKRTCH
NUU
SKRTCH
MMBLE MMBLE
HU HU
SKRRTCH
SKRTCH SKR...
...OKAY, I'M DYING OF CURIOSITY NOW.
WHAT'S THE DRAWING?

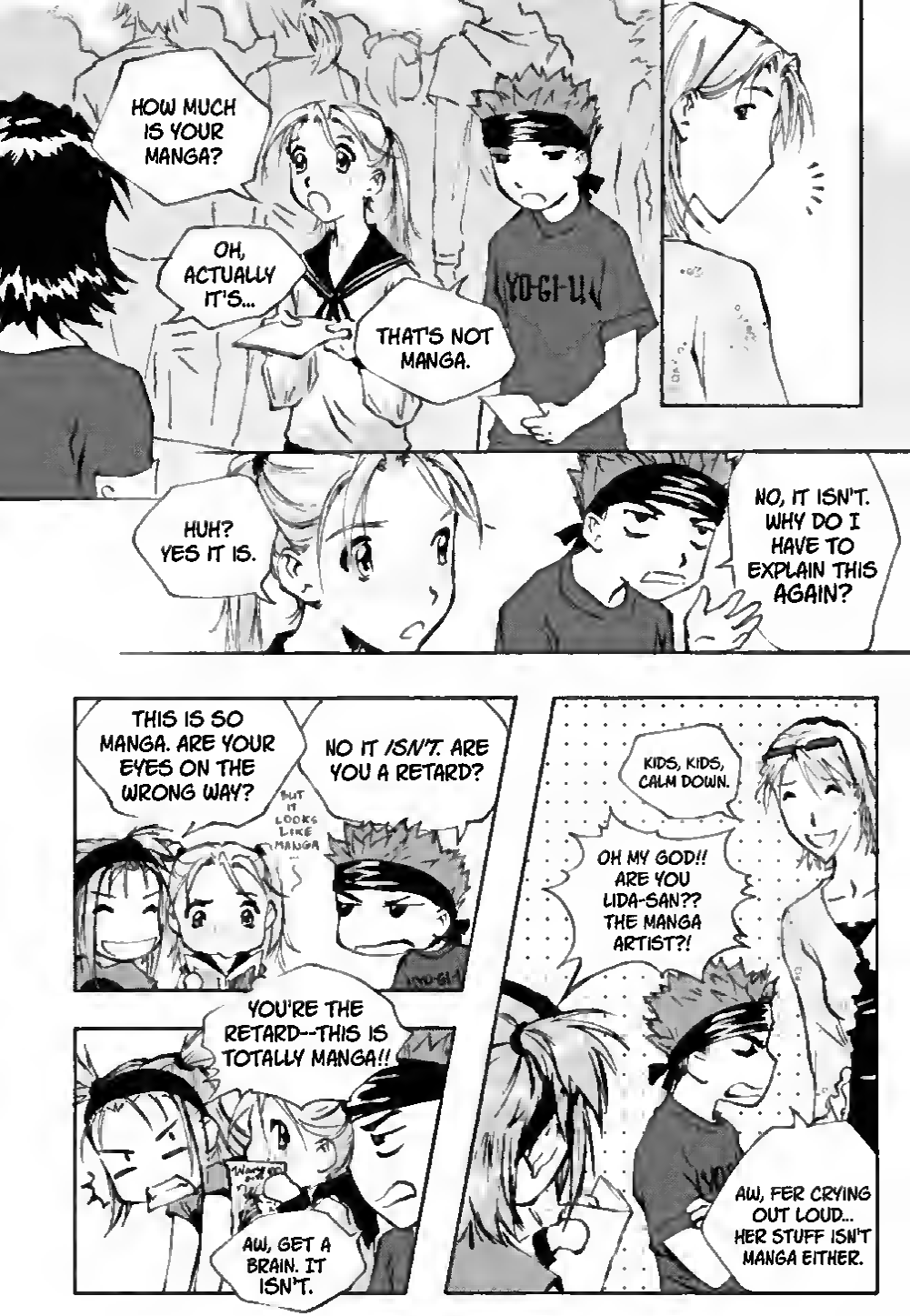
MAY I SEE?
OH UM, SURE.
IT'S JUST A PAGE FOR OUR MANGA. IT'S NOT DONE YET.
BRUSH
BRUSH
THAT'S THE BEST STAGE, I FIND.
BETHANY, RIGHT?
YEP! HOW DID YOU KN--
?
TUG

SCOOT SCOOT
ARE YOU OKAY?
H-HOW LONG WAS SHE STANDING THERE?
A COUPLE OF MINUTES, I THINK? YEAH, ABOUT THERE.
WAS I MAKING FACES AGAIN?!
YOU WERE TOTALLY MAKING FACES.
I WILL HURT YOU BOTH SO MUCH FOR THIS.
BUT YOU LOOKED SO CUUUUUTE!!
...UM, SHOULD I COME BACK?
NO! NO, NO, SORRY ABOUT THAT
PROFESSIONAL
I JUST...I WAS CAUGHT OFF-GUARD BY HOW, UH... SUDDENLY HERE YOU WERE. UM... PLEASE, TAKE A LOOK.

YOU KNOW...
I MAKE FACES WHEN I DRAW, TOO.
...YOU DO?
OH YEAH. PEOPLE ARE AFRAID TO SIT BESIDE ME ON THE PLANE WHEN I TAKE WORK WITH ME.
HA HA, REALLY?!
NO LIE! I REEEEALLY GET INTO IT. I'M TOLD IT'S ESPECIALLY A SIGHT TO BEHOLD WHEN I'M DOING A FIGHT SCENE.
FLIP FLIP
APPARENTLY NOTHING QUITE COMPARES TO TAPPING ME ON THE SHOULDER AND GETTING...
THIS FACE ALONG WITH A...
"YEAH?! WHADDAYA WANT?!"
HA!! I DO THAT SOMETIMES, TOO!!

THAT MEANS YOU PUT REAL EFFORT IN YOUR WORK. WHICH IS VERY IMPRESSIVE, BY THE WAY.
...IT IS? YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE NICE-- I CAN TAKE AN HONEST CRITIQUE...
I'M DEAD SERIOUS. THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO WORK ON, BUT I HAVE TO TELL YOU--IT'S BEEN A VERY LONG TIME SINCE I'VE SEEN SUCH STRONG WORK FROM SOMEONE YOUR AGE. DID YOU GO THROUGH ART SCHOOL?
J-JUST SOME ART WORKSHOPS. I'M MOSTLY SELF-TAUGHT.
...WOW.
I'LL GET TWO COPIES OF THE BOOK, PLEASE.
CHRISTIE'S NOT AROUND? I'D LIKE TO GET YOU BOTH TO SIGN THEM, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
OH, FOR SURE! CHRISTIE'S AT A PANEL--SHE'LL BE BACK IN MAYBE HALF AN HOUR?

NRR, I CAN'T STAY THAT LONG.
BEEP
ARE YOU GOING TO THE PORTFOLIO REVIEWS TOMORROW? I'LL BE AROUND THE MANGAPOP BOOTH DURING THAT TIME.
MAYBE YOU COULD DROP IT OFF THEN, IF IT'S NOT TOO MUCH TROUBLE?
...
UM.
...OKAY, WE'LL DO THAT.
EEEXCELLENT. HEY, COULD I ALSO GET THIS POSTCARD? HOW MUCH IS IT?
OH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT--JUST TAKE IT. THE COMICS, TOO--CHRISTIE WOULD HAVE A FIT IF I CHARGED YOU.
REALLY? WOW, THANKS!
...OOH, CUSTOMERS! I BETTER STOP CROWDING THE TABLE AND LET PEOPLE SEE YOUR STUFF.
I'LL SEE YOU TWO TOMORROW?
YES! SEE YOU LATER!


HOW MUCH IS YOUR MANGA?
OH, ACTUALLY IT'S...
THAT'S NOT MANGA.
YU-GI-U
HUH? YES IT IS.
NO, IT ISN'T. WHY DO I HAVE TO EXPLAIN THIS AGAIN?
THIS IS SO MANGA. ARE YOUR EYES ON THE WRONG WAY?
NO IT ISN'T. ARE YOU A RETARD?
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE MANGA...
KIDS, KIDS, CALM DOWN.
OH MY GOD!! ARE YOU LIDA-SAN?? THE MANGA ARTIST?!
YOU'RE THE RETARD--THIS IS TOTALLY MANGA!!
AW, GET A BRAIN. IT ISN'T.
AW, FER CRYING OUT LOUD... HER STUFF ISN'T MANGA EITHER.

...SO?
SO DON'T CALL IT MANGA!!
HON, WE CAN CALL IT FRIED CHEESE IF WE WANT TO--LAST I CHECKED THIS WAS A FREE COUNTRY.
YU-GI-UH
.....
YOU'RE SUCH A LOSER, JIM. THIS IS TOTALLY MANGA! LOOK, SEE? CHIBIS!
JIM, GUYS, COME ON.
IT'S NOT! MANGA!
WHY NOT?!
BECAUSE SHE'S NOT JAPANESE!! MANGA IS A JAPANESE ARTFORM!
SO IF A NON-JAPANESE PERSON DRAWS IT, IT'S NOT MANGA?
EXACTLY! GET IT NOW??

APPLYING THIS LOGIC TO SOMETHING ELSE WE ALL KNOW AND LOVE...A PIZZA IS NOT A PIZZA UNLESS IT'S BAKED BY AN ITALIAN IN ITALY. YES?
.....
MANGA IS NOT PIZZA.
YES, WELL, NOTHING IN THIS WORLD IS PERFECT.
I REALLY TH
ARE YOU ALL ****ING STUPID??!!!

WHOA, LANGUAGE!
SHUT UP!! MANGA IS JAPANESE!!!
KID, CALM DO~
YOU'RE NOT JAPANESE!! SO YOU CAN'T DRAW MANGA!
SHE'S NOT JAPANESE EITHER!!
SHE'S NOT EVEN WHITE!!

CHAPTER 4

OKAY, THAT'S JUST...
JAMES THEODORE WILLIAMS!!!
OH #$%@.
OH #$%@ IS *RIGHT*, YOUNG MAN!!
YOU APOLOGIZE TO THESE LADIES, IMMEDIATELY!
...
NO? WELL, GUESS WHAT--?
WE ARE GOING HOME RIGHT NOW, BECAUSE YOU JUST GOT YOURSELF GROUNDED FOR THE REST OF YOUR NATURAL LIFE!!
YOU CAN'T DO THAT!!

I'M YOUR MOTHER-- I CAN ABSOLUTELY DO THAT!! I DIDN'T RAISE SOME RACIST PISSANT, MOUTHING OFF TO HIS SENIORS!
...
SENIOR
LADIES, I AM SO SORRY ABOUT THIS.
...PERHAPS IT WAS JUST A POOR CHOICE OF WORDS? NOTHING A BRIEF REFRESHER ON BASIC MANNERS CAN'T FIX.
AND HE'LL BE GETTING ONE, YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT!
MISS, I'D LIKE TO BUY YOUR BOOK IF I MAY, AND SEE THAT HE READS IT.
OH, UM, ARE YOU SURE? IT'S ACTUALLY NOT FOR KIDS HIS AGE--IT'S 13+.

...BLESS YOUR HEART, GIRL. GIVE ME TWO.
I'LL GIVE IT TO HIM WHEN HE GROWS UP.
NOW THERE'S A DECENT PERSON YOU'D DO WELL TO LEARN FROM!
WHAT AN EMBARRASSMENT. WAIT 'TIL YOUR FATHER HEARS ABOUT THIS!
SNF
YU-GI-U
.....
...WELL. WASN'T THAT EXCITING!
KINDA LIKE BEING BACK HOME AND READING SOME ANIME FORUMS. MINUS THE PART WHERE A PARENT SHOWS UP, HEH.
UM, MISS LIDA?
HMM?
OHGOSH. D-DO YOU, UM...DO YOU REMEMBER ME?
THE COSTUME LOOKS FAMILIAR...
YOU POSTED A PICTURE OF THIS ON MY FORUM--ARE YOU NORIKO-CHAN?
YES!!
DO I GET A COOKIE?
NO, BUT, YOU GET THE...

FANCLUB GLOW
AAAH, THE WHOLE GANG'S HERE?! CAREFUL, CAREFUL!!
COME, COME, WE HAVE A SURPRISE FOR YOU!!
COULD IT BE THAT HAT YOU'VE BEEN PROMISING SINCE FOREVER?
YOU OKAY?
FINE, FINE.
IT WASN'T HARD TO GUESS, HUH?
OKAY, WHO TOLD?!
NOT ME!
GUYS, HANG ON A SEC--I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU STAYED ALL COOL LIKE THAT! I WANTED TO SLAP THAT BRAT SO BAD.
AW, COME ON, HE'S JUST A KID.
EVERYTHING OKAY OVER HERE?
SORRY THAT GOT SO UGLY. I SHOULDN'T HAVE TEASED HIM.

THAT WASN'T YOUR FAULT! HOW ARE YOU?
YOU GOT THE BULK OF THE YELLING, THERE.
OH, I'M USED TO ALL KINDS OF THINGS BY NOW.
YOU SHOULD SEE SOME OF THE MAIL I GET. THIS ONE JUST HAD VOLUME TO GO WITH THE WORDS.
I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW?
WE'LL BE THERE!
OVER HERE, OVER HERE!
OKAY, WHERE IS THAT HAT?
I GOT FIVE MINUTES BEFORE MY EDITOR STARTS LOOKING FOR ME WITH A BIG STICK!
HEY, CAN I SEE YOUR BOOK?
YEAH, OF COURSE!
WE'RE SITTING ACROSS THE WAY-- HEARD ALL THE FUSS. HEY, THIS IS REALLY GOOD! DO YOU DO BOOK TRADES?
BOOK TRADE? AS IN--OUR BOOK FOR YOURS?
YEP. HEY, I WANNA TRADE, TOO!

.....
...WHAT?
YOU'RE GOING TO BE AN ACCOUNTANT?
YEAH, YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH THAT?
NO NO! NO, I JUST THOUGHT...YOU JUST SEEM...
KEEP TALKING.
I KINDA THOUGHT YOU WERE IN A GANG OR SOMETHING.
HA HA
THAT'S HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY. I WASN'T KEEN ON JAIL AS A CAREER CHOICE.
OH GOD! I WAS JUST JOKING ABOUT THE GANG THING.

AH HA HA! RIGHT! S-SO... ACCOUNTING. DO YOU LIKE IT?
IT'S OKAY. NUMBERS ARE NOT AS SCREWED UP AS PEOPLE. EASIER TO MANAGE.
...IS THAT WHY YOU'RE OUT HERE? TOO MANY PEOPLE INSIDE?
PRETTY MUCH. AND I GOT TIRED OF BEING A FASHIONABLY DRESSED MONKEY ON DISPLAY.
HOW COME YOU COME HERE? WHY DRESS UP? IF YOU DON'T LIKE PEOPLE, I MEAN. YOU DO KINDA DRAW ATTENTION, YOU KNOW.
FUNNY, I'VE BEEN ASKING MYSELF THAT SAME QUESTION EVER SINCE I GOT HERE.

AND?
...
COME ON, I PROMISE I WON'T LAUGH. TOO MUCH.
BIG OF YOU.
I KNOW, I'M COOL LIKE THAT.
WELL...
IT'S A CHANCE TO BE SOMEONE DIFFERENT, I GUESS.
EASIER TO BE A FREAK IN A CROWD OF OTHER FREAKS. ALMOST FEELS NORMAL.
!
MATT, THEY'RE NOT FREAKS, AND NEITHER ARE YOU.

. . . . . .
I GUESS THAT DEPENDS ON WHO'S LOOKING. YOU'RE A NICE PERSON-- FIGURES YOU'D SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY.
HEY, YOU'RE A NICE PERSON!
NO, I'M NOT. THANKS FOR LYING, THOUGH.
WELL.. WHAT DO YOU SEE, WHEN YOU LOOK?
A CESSPIT. A TRULY SPECTACULAR RANGE OF ALL THAT'S UGLY IN PEOPLE.

THAT'S...COME ON, THAT'S NOT! I MEAN, TRUE, I'VE MET SOME JERKY FANS... ONLINE, ESPECIALLY...BUT THERE ARE TONS OF NICE PEOPLE, TOO!
I'M SURE THERE ARE. YOU'LL HAVE TO INTRODUCE ME SOMETIME.
I WILL! OUR ARTIST ALLEY NEIGHBORS ARE REALLY...
...WELL, THE NEIGHBORS ON THE RIGHT ARE KIND OF JERKY, ACTUALLY.
AND THAT'S JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. ANOTHER EXAMPLE--YOU KNOW THAT COSPLAYERS POST PICTURES OF THEMSELVES ON THE WEB?
YEAH.
THERE ARE ENTIRE COMMUNITIES DEDICATED TO COLLECTING THE NOT-SO-GOOD ONES, AND PUTTING THEM UP IN 'HALLS OF SHAME.' STUFF THAT GETS TYPED THERE COULD PEEL THE PAINT OFF A BARN.
WHAT?!
REALLY?!
BUT THAT'S SO MEAN!
YEAH, WELL. BLOOD SPORTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT.
WOW, I DIDN'T KNOW THIS... I WAS THINKING OF TRYING COSPLAY. IT LOOKS FUN.
START BY GROWING THICK SKIN. 'NOT-SO-GOOD' COULD MEAN ANYTHING--BAD PHOTO, WRONG FABRIC, NOT CLOSE ENOUGH DESIGN, TOO FAT, TOO SKINNY, TOO OLD...

A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE...
...GET THEIR FUN FROM LAUGHING SOMEONE DOWN.
BECAUSE THE EASIEST WAY TO FEEL BIG IS TO MAKE SOMEONE ELSE FEEL SMALL.
...